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SUBJECT: PM MALIKI UPBEAT ON REACTION TO RECONCILIATION PLAN

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (C) Summary: In a June 28 meeting, Prime Minister Maliki said that he is optimistic about his upcoming trip to the Gulf and pleased with Ambassador's readout of his own consultations in Jeddah, in which Ambassador reported that the Saudis are ready to help Maliki with reconciliation and the International Compact. Maliki said that he was surprised with the positive reaction to his reconciliation proposal, both internationally and at home. Maliki cited cases in which armed groups have signaled their desire to disarm and rejoin the Iraqi body politic. Maliki said that views in his cabinet range from support for total amnesty for everyone, to no amnesty at all. He will begin consultations on membership on the Higher Council for National Reconciliation on June 29.

After initial concerns over lack of consultation, both Ayatollah Sistani and Shaykh Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim reportedly are now supportive of the reconciliation plan. End Summary.

Travel to the Gulf

[12](#). (C) On June 28, the Ambassador briefed Prime Minister Maliki on his trip to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia the previous day. Ambassador reported that the Saudis are looking forward to welcoming the Prime Minister to Jeddah and that they relayed their readiness to provide aircraft for his trip. Maliki said that he would take an Iraqi airplane to Jeddah but that he had accepted a Saudi offer of an aircraft to take him from Jeddah to the UAE and on to Kuwait.

[13](#). (C) The Ambassador reported that the Saudis said they would help on the International Compact, serve on the Steering Group, and host meetings if necessary. If it proves impossible to gather appropriately senior officials for a preparatory meeting in Baghdad on either July 12 or 17, Ambassador said, the Saudis would consider hosting the meeting in the Kingdom. Alternatively, the Saudis also indicated that they would consider hosting the final, pledging conference. The Ambassador advised Maliki to tell the Saudis what he would prefer. Maliki told the Ambassador that Barham Salih had just suggested the possibility of holding the final event in New York during the UNGA, to take advantage of the presence of so many foreign ministers. Maliki wondered, however, if doing it in the U.S. would make it appear too much a U.S.-sponsored event. Ambassador agreed that it could but doubted that the process could be completed by September. (In a later meeting, Barham Salih told the Ambassador he believed he could be ready by the end of September).

[14](#). (C) Ambassador said that the Saudis also indicated willingness -- if the Prime Minister thought they could be helpful -- to work with some of the Iraqi parties on reconciliation. The Ambassador told the Prime Minister that the Saudis would help him if he asks. Maliki said that he

needs the Saudis' support and that he hopes that the U.A.E. could also use its influence in support of Iraqi reconciliation. The Ambassador suggested that the Prime Minister's agreement to return 59 Saudi detainees to the Kingdom would be a well-appreciated gesture. MNF-I is ready to transfer them to Saudi Arabian custody, Ambassador said. Maliki said that it is a sensitive matter that could affect the Iraqi street; he would have to study the issue and noted a similar problem with Lebanon regarding extradition.

Reconciliation

15. (S) The Ambassador asked the Prime Minister what the reaction had been to his reconciliation proposals, whether he had an implementing plan yet, and if the U.S. could help. The Prime Minister said he had been surprised at the positive reaction both internationally and at home. The international and regional reaction had positively affected the attitude of Iraqis themselves. Already, Maliki said that he has received indications that some rejectionist groups might be ready to disarm. Aiham Samarie (Sunni former Minister of Electricity) has conveyed to the PM that there are four groups ready to disarm, and Ansar al Islam in Kurdistan also has come forward. Some small Shia groups, including some associated with the JAM, have also come forward with their support for reconciliation. Maliki said that he had received messages of support from senior figures of the Sunni Waqf, including from Ahmed Abdel Ghafur Samarie, and a number of civil society leaders.

16. (C) The Prime Minister said a number of tribal leaders have also told him they are "ready." If it were not for his upcoming trip, Maliki said that he would have begun setting up governorate and local-level reconciliation committees

BAGHDAD 00002281 002 OF 002

immediately. The PM said that he intends to begin discussions the next day on the composition of the Higher Council for National Reconciliation and Dialogue. The Minister of State for National Dialogue, plus representatives from the major constitutional bodies and political blocs, would be involved in the creation of this Council. Maliki also will have representatives from Basrah. (NOTE: In an aside, Maliki told the Ambassador that he had sent a message to the governor of Basrah not to interfere with the military team he would be sending to Basrah. END NOTE.)

17. (C) The Prime Minister also reported progress in setting up committees to fast-track review of detainee files, but assured the Ambassador that those who attacked the MNF-I would not be recommended for release. This prompted recall of the Prime Minister's former spokesman Adnan Ali, who claimed the Prime Minister had called for an amnesty for those who had killed Coalition Forces. The Prime Minister called Ali a "liar" and said that, not only had he (Maliki) never said such a thing, but that he regretted any damage that it might have caused to the U.S.-Iraqi relationship and to the feelings of all those working in Iraq. The Ambassador told him of his own recent remarks on the issue of amnesty and on the need to balance the requirements of reconciliation with the requirements of justice. Although the issue would be difficult to solve, Ambassador said that he hopes that those of goodwill would keep an open mind. The Prime Minister described wide divisions among Iraqis on this issue. His cabinet, for example, ranges from support for a broad amnesty to total rejection of the idea. Many Iraqis are angry about any detainee releases, Maliki noted, while others demand that all the detainees should be freed. Maliki said that he hopes to find the needed wisdom and to be able to maintain accountability, but he does not believe that a broad amnesty could be seriously considered until stability had been restored.

18. (C) As an example of the strong views relating to detainees, Maliki said that the cabinet voted unanimously to

keep Abu Ghraib open. Although some new prisons are under construction, the Iraqis need Abu Ghuraib to house the prisoner population, Maliki stated. The Prime Minister said further consultation with the U.S. is needed on the detainee issue and acknowledged that the current situation is irregular (referring to the lack of timely judicial review of those detained). The Ambassador said that the U.S. needs a reliable Iraqi counterpart on this issue. The Prime Minister said he had asked the Minister of Justice and a representative of the Judiciary to serve on a committee to deal with the MNF-I, but agreed to appoint a specific official to serve as a point of contact on this issue.

19. (C) Finally, in response to the Ambassador's question regarding the views of Ayatollah Sistani on the reconciliation plan, the Prime Minister said that he heard that Mohammad Ridha Sistani initially had expressed concern but is now supportive. Maliki acknowledged that he should have provided the text of the reconciliation plan to Mohammad Ridha before announcing it publicly. Likewise, Shaykh Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim -- who has been out of the country -- also expressed consternation since he had not been consulted in advance, but the Prime Minister understands that Hakim now is comfortable with the proposal.

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